

2007

Human Rights and the War on Terror: The Effects of the Madrid and London Subway Bombings on Europe's View of Terrorism

Katie Friesen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw>



Part of the [International Humanitarian Law Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Military, War, and Peace Commons](#), [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), and the [Terrorism Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Friesen, Katie (2007) "Human Rights and the War on Terror: The Effects of the Madrid and London Subway Bombings on Europe's View of Terrorism," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 29.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol7/iss1/29>

This Topical Research Digest is brought to you for free and open access by the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Rights & Human Welfare by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Human Rights and the War on Terror: The Effects of the Madrid and London Subway Bombings on Europe's View of Terrorism

Abstract

Terrorism within Europe, until 2004, was limited to internal, historical conflict between the state and dissenting factions, such as Spain's Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) or the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom. Islamic violence was strongly linked to the Middle East, as well as to America's "War on Terror" initiative following the attacks of September 11. However, after the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the London subway bombings in 2005, Islamist terrorism has not only become a very real threat, it has also developed into an issue with which Europeans identify personally. The bombings resulted in mass casualties which have, in turn, altered many of Europe's views regarding its role in the "War on Terror," the origins of terrorism, and security policy more generally. The following bibliography addresses some of the key outcomes regarding European responses to the Islamic attacks.

Keywords

Human rights, War on terror, Middle East, Europe

The Effects of the Madrid and London Subway Bombings On Europe's View of Terrorism

By Katie Friesen

Terrorism within Europe, until 2004, was limited to internal, historical conflict between the state and dissenting factions, such as Spain's Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) or the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom. Islamic violence was strongly linked to the Middle East, as well as to America's "War on Terror" initiative following the attacks of September 11. However, after the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the London subway bombings in 2005, Islamist terrorism has not only become a very real threat, it has also developed into an issue with which Europeans identify personally. The bombings resulted in mass casualties which have, in turn, altered many of Europe's views regarding its role in the "War on Terror," the origins of terrorism, and security policy more generally. The following bibliography addresses some of the key outcomes regarding European responses to the Islamic attacks.

Europe's Involvement in the "War on Terror"

Europe's involvement in the "War on Terror," specifically support given to the United States by Britain and Spain, has been identified as a motivation for the recent bombings in both Madrid and London. Originally strong supporters of the war, amidst a trend of overall European disapproval, it has been argued that their past assistance to the war efforts has made each country a target. Although not clear initially, both bombings were eventually determined to be the work of Muslim individuals or groups. This marked a clear change from previous terrorism acts done by the ETA in Spain and by the IRA in London.

From the point of view of the militants, the bombings in Europe demonstrated that the targeted governments were not fully capable of protecting the rights of their citizens. Certain militant groups claimed that the attacks weakened democratic values touted by supporters of the "War on Terror." Similarly, they claimed that efforts to promote human rights in Muslim societies were invalidated by the successful infiltration by terrorists. In many ways the attacks undermined what had seemed to be an impenetrable, democratic society.

With this new threat exposed, Spain sought to determine the most appropriate response. The Madrid train bombings caused general public upheaval days before a national election and due to the administration's initial accusation of the Basque separatists, the bombings are said to have influenced the election results. Since Spain had not been a target for terrorism historically, the bombing was a significant indicator of the effects of Spain's support of the "War on Terror." While many conclusions were drawn as to the reason behind the attacks, public response in Spain against the Iraq war greatly increased after the bombings.

The subway bombings in London helped make the "War on Terror" a more provocative matter. Public sentiment against the war increased after the bombings, as most attributed the incident and deaths to another Islamic terrorist act. More significantly, for Britons, the level of association with America's 9/11 incident increased. With this association, camaraderie developed between many

American and British people. Many Americans considered the London bombings to be similar to an attack on American soil, felt that the London bombings were akin to reopening the wounds left from 9/11 and therefore were strongly affected by the casualties. As one of the U.S.'s closest and strongest allies, the London incident and multiple casualties were likened to an attack on a family member. The impact from the bombings decreased support for the war in Iraq as it became more personal for those in the United Kingdom who had previously felt it was an American war. Just as the bombings were the bloodiest day in London since World War II, the day exemplified that the threat of terrorism did not impact America exclusively.

The attacks also brought to light the issue of how the European Union should respond to future attacks. While some felt that a defensive unilateral strategy and proportional response was best, others called for careful consideration and multilateral cooperation. This debate continues presently, as both proactive measures and withdrawal from the "War on Terror" are endorsed. Although Europe still maintains a presence in Iraq, material and public support has decreased overall since the bombings.

Multiculturalism

After the bombings, many people in Britain began targeting the Muslim population, and calling into question the multiculturalism of the region. London, known for its characteristic cultural districts and large Muslim population, became the subject for books such as Londonistan by Melanie Phillips, which details London's inclusive cultural policies and the negative impact which these Islamic-friendly policies have had upon the strength of the state as a whole. Some, such as Phillips, feel that London's multiculturalism functions as an incubator for creating citizens who are not committed to preserving the strength of Britain, but instead are committed to their own culture's causes. Britain has been increasingly criticized for promoting multiculturalism by those who blame the casualties of the bombing on such a multi-faceted environment capable of creating Muslim radicals.

The fact that three of the four terrorists responsible for the London bombings were British citizens has been attributed to the capacity for "home-grown" threats within such a diverse environment. With this threat has come the issue of ethnic profiling, which has become a common response by some to the attacks in Europe. In turn, the level of xenophobia has been raised by the assumption that terror can be a product of a specific culture within the greater European society.

The rights of many Muslims in Europe have been negatively impacted based upon their nationality, as it is associated with terrorist activity. While no anti-Muslim policies have been enacted, overall public sentiment has at times been against the European Muslim population and its presumed potential for violence. The human rights of Muslims as a cultural group has since become an issue of great debate within international society, and many human rights advocates have expressed concern at the number of Muslims, suspected of being terrorists, who are being detained in European prisons. With the heightened anxiety since the 2004 and 2005 attacks, the level of prejudice against Muslim society has increased as well.

The need for effective integration of Muslims into European society has therefore become an issue of great concern. While it is a complicated endeavor, evidence shows that the participation of the Muslim population in European democracies can have a limiting effect on future Islamic terrorism. The responsibility of Europe to its Muslim citizens, as a custodian of human rights, includes creating opportunities for political involvement and lessening occurrences of political repression.

Mass-Transit Issues

The Madrid and London bombings provoked a variety of strong responses by European citizens—one being increased concern over the safety of mass transportation. Once considered to be the safest, most convenient form of transportation in metropolitan areas, the use of trains and urban transit systems is now considered to pose a potential security risk for individuals. The massive volume of people makes public transportation a likely public target for terrorist attacks. Since the bombings were carried out during normal commuting hours, a persistent threat of future terrorism contributes to the permeation of fear into the most average of daily tasks.

One major consequence of the terrorism of the past few years has been a shift in European security policies. Not only are there more stringent regulations, there is more emphasis on security, individual accountability, and the pervasive threat of terrorism. The city of London has specifically addressed the issue of potential terrorism after 2005, as has Washington D.C. in the U.S. Many security measures such as the “See It, Say It” policy in the Washington D.C. subway system exist so that individuals are able to maintain some measure of control in such an unpredictable course of events. Passengers are encouraged to immediately alert other passengers, and to report to security any circumstance that seems suspicious or dangerous.

After each attack, a public outcry has occurred for more strict supervision of urban transit systems, train stations, and other avenues of public life. One impediment has been efforts to secure all forms of mass transit without limiting the options available to commuters. The most recent attacks have been the result of disorganized and overlapping *jibadi* groups, which have been difficult to ameliorate. As addressed in the bibliography, various studies have shown that it is virtually impossible to fully eliminate the threat of terrorism in urban transit systems and train stations. A more realistic goal is an efficient system of information and protection, which differs from city to city, and which focuses mainly on technology and policing efforts.

Conclusion

The Madrid bombings of 2004 and London bombings of 2005 have done much to change the tides of security policy and society’s view of terrorism in Europe. Although the mass hysteria witnessed immediately following the attacks has subsided, many Muslims in Europe remain characterized by the public and by the media as extremist and unwelcome. The awareness of and continued efforts to combat the terrorist threat in Europe have maintained their efficacy in the wake of a foiled terrorist plot in London in 2006. Although public and troop support for the “War on

'Terror' from Spain has decreased, Britain still maintains its ties with its American allies. The following bibliography addresses many past and current issues in the examination of terrorism and its effect upon European society.



Europe's Involvement in the "War on Terror"

2004. "[European Commission Action Paper in Response to the Terrorist Attacks on Madrid.](#)" Brussels, European Commission.

Annotation: A response paper which argues for an approach of solidarity and cooperation against terrorism. The E.U. needs to increase its dialogue about terrorism externally, as well as sharing of information internally. A draft proposing these increased efforts against terrorism is included.

2004. Senate Hearing: "[The Effects of the Madrid Terrorist Attacks on U.S.-European Cooperation in the War on Terrorism.](#)" C. o. F. Relations: 65.

Annotation: Committee on Foreign Relations hearing regarding Spain's objectives after the Madrid bombings. Includes several testimonials and recommendations for security improvement, including increased border policing. Hearing focuses on the need for better integration within Europe to combat potential future terrorism.

2007. "Waiting for al-Qaeda's next bomb," *The Economist* 383 (8527): 29.

Annotation: Details the most recent terrorist plot in London and the successful capture of potential terrorists. Discusses fear of future attacks and the achievement of the British intelligence sector, but questions effectiveness.

- Atran, S. 2006. "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism." *The Washington Quarterly*. Spring 2006: 21.

Annotation: Research detailing the many aspects of the phenomenon of suicide terrorism. London bombings are one of many instances, which have increased interest in suicide terrorism and the calculations involved. Presents studies that argue that foreign occupation is a main reason for suicide bombings. Dispels the myth that all bombers are directed by al-Qaeda. Argues

that simple explanations are not appropriate, and that it is important to channel the types of religious beliefs that fuel suicide terrorism.

Balzacq, T. C., Sergio. 2005. "The E.U.'s Fight Against International Terrorism Security Problems, Insecure Problems." CEPS Policy Brief, Center for European Policy Studies: 6.

Annotation: Policy brief detailing the European Union's response to the London bombings. Introduces the strategy to reassert collective action against terrorism within the E.U., specifically in defensive and proactive measures. Argues that the July 13, 2005 E.U. response to the London Bombings creates more problems than it solves. Emphasizes the importance of acting proportionally in any security measure. States that liberal democracies must stress mutual confidence and not "exceptional measures" to avoid undermining the values of the Union itself.

Cottey, A. D., Ian. 2005. "After the London Suicide Bombings: Facing Difficult Choices on Home-grown Terrorism." Occasional Papers on International Security Policy, British American Security Information Council: 4.

Annotation: Topical paper, which raises the question of finding the correct balance between liberty and security in light of the London bombings of 2005. Discusses how the London bombers were raised and somehow radicalized within the European environment. Names Britain as a prime target for terrorists, and therefore is a country that must understand the origin of these types of attacks. Links attacks with Britain's involvement in the "War on Terror." Argues for the likelihood of future terrorist attacks and the necessity for proactive measures against terrorism.

Goldstone, R. 2002. "International Law and Justice and America's War on Terrorism." *Social Research* 69 (4).

Annotation: Details America's involvement in anti-terrorist policies post-September 11th bombings. Discusses how some policies can be harmful to the promotion of human rights worldwide. The fight against terrorism in the U.S. and Europe is important, but must be balanced. Details elements of the legal system in regards to American policy for suspected terrorists.

Hippel, K. V., ed. 2005. Europe Confronts Terrorism. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Annotation: Collection of essays citing different regional examples of terrorism and European strategy. Specific section detailing with terrorism in the United Kingdom.

Shultz, RH., and A. J. Dew. 2006. Insurgents, Terrorists and Militias. New York: Columbia University Press.

Annotation: Describes the rise of non-state actors, defined as insurgents, terrorists, militias, and criminal organizations, which have been responsible for many of the terrorist acts of the past decade. There is a new approach to war; these groups pose diverse threats. Covers four key areas of terrorist activity in the past three decades, including Somalia and Chechnya.

Suter, K. 2005. "Terrorism and International Law." *Contemporary Review*. 287(1677): 6.

Annotation: Opinion piece that explains the difficulty in agreeing upon an international definition of terrorism. Terrorism has more political weight than legal; it is difficult to create an international regime around the issue of terrorism. Current problem with U.S. policy is that it is directly linked to events such as the London bombings, and has created no visible end to the "War on Terror." The prism of terrorism through which policy is framed has contributed to the greater issue.

Tiersky, R. 2005. "Clouds over Europe." *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27: 385-393.

Annotation: An opinion piece regarding the effects of the bombings on European society. The piece shows that due to the attacks, Europeans now live with another layer of fear. If this continues, it is argued that the psyche of European countries could be affected and large economies destabilized. Demonstrates that a weak Europe puts focus on China as it rises in prominence, while Europe faces a lack of integration, economic stagnation, and fear of future attacks.

Zuhur, S. 2005. *A Hundred Osamas: Islamist Threats and the Future of Counterinsurgency*. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute.

Annotation: Opinion piece that compares London and Madrid bombings to wider problems such as *jihadists* and Muslim extremists. Argues that Islamist insurgencies are targeting the withdrawal of Western forces from many areas of the world through the use of Western technical and analytical methods. The continuing threat posed by these activities forces a response and requires a strategy that is not simply a review of failures and attempts to contain Muslim forces.

Multiculturalism

2005. "The Other In Our Midst: After the London Bombing." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 22(4).

Annotation: Interview with author and professor Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan explains that many young Muslims are socialized but vulnerable to pressure from *jihadis* telling them they need to "purify" their faith. Believes the best way for frustrated Muslims to get involved is to join developed democracies, not engage in terrorist acts. Describes Europe's responsibility to these home-grown terrorists. Piece stresses successful integration of Muslims into greater society as method of combating terrorism.

Encarnacion, O. G. 2003. "Managing Ethnic Conflict in Spain." *Orbis* 47 (1): 89-106.

Annotation: Discusses Spain's history of political conflict rooted in its ethnic diversity. Spain's successful management of its ethnic minorities has been in response to past terrorist conflict within the state, as well as Spain's presence on an international level. Explains how state-building in the international community can be controversial.

Phillips, M. 2006. *Londonistan*. New York: Encounter Books.

Annotation: Argues that London became the hub of Islamic terror factions primarily through immigration. U.K. was unprepared for the bombings due to its refusal to blame Islamic fanaticism as the problem. Britain is being targeted by an enemy it does not understand, which puts the U.K. and America at risk. Appeasing terrorists becomes an "intersection of aggressive religious fanaticism with the multicultural ideology of victimhood," thus limiting the options of the British state.

Sanadjian, M. 2006. "Fear, Terror, and the New Global Economy of Salvation-Global Excess and 'Suicide' Bombing of London." *Social Identities* 12 (6): 701-725.

Annotation: Illustrates how the Muslim suicide bombers of the London bombings of 2005 created a "mutual exclusivity" between their religious identity as Muslims and their British citizenship. The bombers utilized a type of power that exists outside the realm of politics, thus inspiring fear within the state system and society. Shows how the public nature of their declaration replaced the "uncertainty of fear with the certainty of terror" as these bombers chose no specific group, but instead left their message of Muslim fanaticism for the entire society of the U.K. and region.

Tausch, A. 2007. "Quantitative World System Studies Contradict Current Islamophobia: World Political Cycles, Global Terrorism, and World Development." *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Studies* 6 (1 & 2): 67.

Annotation: Research piece based on world political development studies. Finds that global capitalist system, not Muslim nations, is creating conflict. Refutes Samuel Huntington's thesis concerning the capability of Muslim nations to secure successful socio-economic development. Contains explanation of controversial Kondratiev cycles of global development statistics in relation to terrorism and "Islamophobia," as well as some explanation of economic theory in relation to global terrorism. Concludes with focus on positive impacts made by Muslims in contrast to many European studies.

Mass transit issues

Johnstone, B. 2005. "New Strategies to Protect America: Terrorism and Mass Transit after London and Madrid." *Homeland Security, Center For American Progress*: 21.

Annotation: Explains that the focus of the Department of Homeland Security is geared towards issues of safety in mass transit. While a great deal of resources has been designated for protecting safety, there has yet to be a comprehensive solution. Argues for the development of more sophisticated technology, as well as considering America to be a "central front" in the "War on Terror."

Loukaitou-Sideris, A., et al. 2006. "Rail Transit Security in an International Context: Lessons from Four Cities." *Urban Affairs Review* 41 (6): 21.

Annotation: Interviews with various security individuals following the Madrid and London bombings. Finds that security is an increasing concern amongst officials. Examination of mass transit systems in light of current terrorist threats. Study of four major cities: Paris, London, Madrid, Tokyo. Addresses their security plans. Concludes that it is impossible to fully secure mass transit systems, but that they are better policed than they were.